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The Landmarks of Federal Hill: Federal Hill House "It Holds Many Meanings For Many Persons"

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The Landmarks Of Federal Hill

BY COMM. JOSEPH R. MURATORE (c) 1979

PHOTOS BY TONY VICARIO

Federal Hill House, was, for more than one-half century, located at 400 Atwells Avenue. It holds many meanings for many persons.

Contrary to many persons' belief, Federal Hill House, was not founded on Federal Hill, nor was it founded with the thought in mind of offering the many services it would offer to a newborn community.

Federal Hill House was started in 1877, in the Mount Pleasant section, and was referred to as, "The Mount Pleasant Working Girls Club and Library." It was founded on Armington Street by Miss Alida E. Sprague, a young lady who was full of determination to do something for humanity.

Miss Sprague saw a need among working girls for a center to develop

arts, crafts, culture, and alone, founded the Mount Pleasant Working Girls Club. She gave her time, her efforts, and money; She taught culture, arts and crafts to the girls.

In appreciation of her endless devotion, the club members voted to change the name of their meeting place to Sprague House. The home expanded its services rapidly, and with the motivating backing of its founder, became co-educational in its services.

Miss Sprague married Dr. Whitmarsh, who was one of the founders of the Homeopathic Hospital; He also became interested, and later rendered services to this new founded club. When the founder saw the Italian Federal Hill district growing as fast as it was, and becoming so congested, in 1910, she decided to rent a tenement at 417 Atwells Avenue, directly across where the later Federal Hill House was to be located, and transferred the Sprague House community work to that tenement. She asked her Board of Directors to change the name to Federal Hill House Association. She took a hand in teaching sewing and embroidery, sponsoring a milk station for children of the community, and obtaining teachers for health work.

In 1916, she became the chief motivator in establishing the new building at 400 Atwells Avenue, and, 11 years later, she aided in obtaining Providence Community Fund support. Her "baby" had grown beyond even her fondest expectations.

Every year, she attended the annual board meetings, and took special pride in seeing the annual evergreen tree, that she personally saw was erected at Christmas time, for the youngsters' Christmas parties. Some of her comments were very reflective: "Through great efforts, some painful experiences, and many hopes and prayers, Federal Hill House was born. The services offered by this center, far out-stripped, even the hopes that accompanied its beginnings. I pray that it may have a long existence, in order for it to act as a link of brotherhood, between Italian and English speaking people of Providence. For this purpose, it was built and dedicated."

During the years of its peak activities, Federal Hill House provided a gymnasium for the community, rooms for groups of women to sew, and to learn how to embroider; It provided classes for people to learn English; It kept the young boys busy with arts and crafts; It was headquarters for Boy Scout troops; A busy gymnasium, with all sorts of sports; It conducted cooking classes for the young

ladies to learn new recipes; It had a library that, at many times, held as many as one hundred boys and girls, reading books for their school work; and It provided clinics which were conducted for the inoculation of children.

These are but a few of the activities that Federal Hill House has provided Federal Hill, during a period of transition, when the community and its newly arrived residents needed assistance of every kind and nature.

At its peak years of operation, there were more than 3,200 members enrolled. Nearly 2,000 of them attended classes and club meetings about three times each week, while they also attended public and parochial school classes, or were working in shops, stores, or at home. It, perhaps, is a record unequalled by any other such center in Rhode Island.

Although it was founded for working girls only, through this purpose, all these other services to the community, were expanded and offered. Many fine directors have lead Federal Hill House, all very devoted, each adding to the services and facilities of this community house. Although the original Federal Hill House was destroyed by fire a few years ago, and completely demolished, many still remember its fancy grilled metal work above the double front door, that led to a community house that meant so much, in so many ways, to so many.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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Federal Hill House

**“It Holds Many Meanings,
For Many Persons”**



405 BROADWAY - THE SPICER CARRIAGE HOUSE

Built around 1870. It is a two story late Victorian Italianate bracketed hip roof carriage house. The roof brackets are identical to the George T. Spicer house at 401 Broadway.



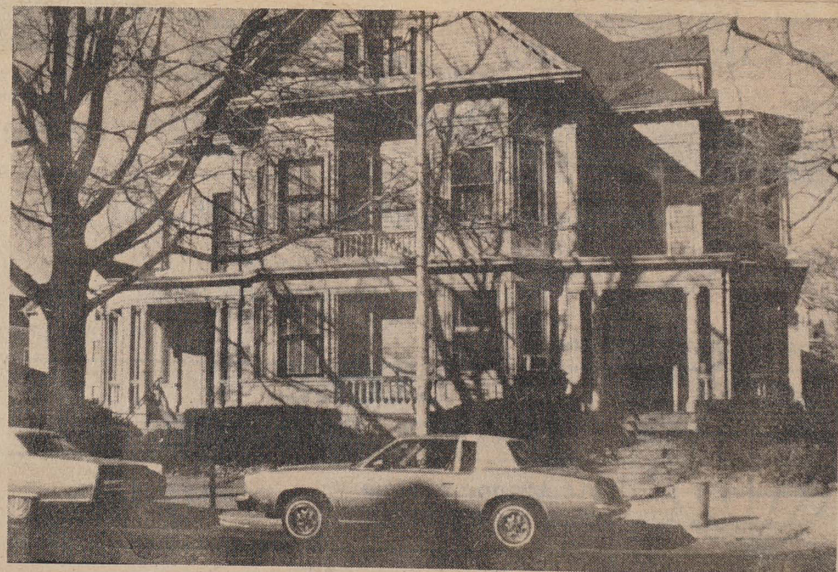
454 BROADWAY - THE GEORGE A. RICHARDS HOUSE

Built about 1860, this is a 2½ story early Victorian Italianate Pallazzo with hip roof and dormers. The facade exhibits delicate Italianate portico, with arched transom lights. It was built for a prosperous furniture dealer, whose business was A. B. Corry & Sons, who conducted it at 104 Westminster Street; By 1875, it became Corry & Richards at 117 Summer Street. This house illustrates the transition from the Pallazzo form to the more formal elegance of the French Second Empire style.



402 BROADWAY - ST. JAMES EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Built around 1890. It is a late Victorian Romanesque structure, with steep gabled roof, and an anchored corner tower. It was designed by C. Howard Walker of Boston. It originally served Saint James's Parish, later the home of Church of the Savior, and later the home of Saint Vartanantz Parish of the Armenian All-Saints Apostolic Church.



409-411 BROADWAY

A beautiful residence which was built around 1895. It is a 2½ story late Victorian-Queen Anne home, with hipped roof and cross gable. The beautiful original Ionic style columns on the front porch may still be seen.



446 BROADWAY

A beautiful substantial residence, built around 1883. This is a 2½ story late Victorian house, with mansard roof and Italianate portico, with double dormers, and transom lights. This home has much detail. It was used as a doctor's office for many years.



412-428 BROADWAY - THE COLIN C. BAKERS ROW HOUSE

Built around 1870. This is a 2½ story late Victorian mansard roof row type house, of a type rare in Providence. This row house contains three double entrances, Italianate porticos, and symmetrical two story bay windows, set in granite frames. The Italian Vice-Consulate Office opened at 426 Broadway on September 22, 1973.